



GTECH Strategies celebrated its ReClaim McKeesport ambassadors

with a course-closing graduation ceremony Sept. 30 at the McKeesport Regional History & Heritage Center.

GTECH, which stands for Growth Through Energy and Community Health, moved outside of Pittsburgh for the first time in 2014 for a yearlong community development course and neighborhood beautification projects.

Graduating ambassadors were Alandra Bell, Kimberly Brownfield-Perkins, Julie Fleckenstein, Dana Jackson, Sharon Soles, Rochelle Williams, Shari Holland and Walt Yager, and alternate Hank Gostkowski.

GTECH founder and CEO Andrew Butcher said McKeesport's volunteer leaders personify the concepts upon which the Pittsburgh-based agency was formed.

"The Reclaim McKeesport cohort is proving that the most inspiring things can happen in places with a little bit of energy and small, tangible actions lead by people who are passionate and hungry for positive change," Butcher said. "We are proud to have been a part of this effort and grateful to the McKeesport community for joining us in a shared journey."

With a yearlong course of community development workshops, the Reclaim McKeesport ambassadors have become empowered as active citizens.

GTECH project manager James Snow described ReClaim McKeesport as a "huge success."

Projects included a neighborhood retreat on the city's former reservoir site at Union and Beaver streets and one in the Library-Manor District, creative play areas on Bouquet and Market streets, gardens along the Great Allegheny Passage, the neighborhood entrance to Myer Park, the old railroad tower at Kelly Park, and the triangle at Penn State Greater Allegheny's O'Neil Boulevard entrance.



"We had more than 270 volunteers put in more than 1,210 volunteer hours on these nine projects," Snow said. "That's impressive, because it shows the spirit of the community of McKeesport coming together to make a difference."

McKeesport Mayor Michael Cherepko said the city's ambassadors have embraced his administration's motto of "Working Together for a Better McKeesport."

"These are people who truly care about the city of McKeesport," Cherepko said. "They have invested countless hours of education, labor and fundraising to make a difference in their corners of our city. With some individuals focusing on neighborhood lots and others working on downtown parklets, they're changing how people see vacant land in our city."

The ReClaim McKeesport project has served as a vehicle for future opportunities, Snow explained.

"These sites have been open for the community to enjoy from a beautification standpoint and an engagement standpoint," Snow said. "And the individuals who led these projects are taking on the mantle of civic leadership and are now finding new opportunities to make McKeesport a better place."

GTECH thanked the following partners for contributing funds, volunteer hours and oversight of ReClaim McKeesport: Mayor Michael Cherepko and staff, the Benedum Foundation, McKeesport Hospital Foundation, Habitat for Humanity, Green Building Alliance, McKeesport Area School District, Kiwanis Club of McKeesport/White Oak, McKeesport Lions Club, Mon River Fleet Lions Club, McKeesport Trail Commission, Penn State Greater Allegheny, Auberle, McKeesport Regional History and Heritage Center, Allegheny Partners for Out-of-School Time, McKeesport Family Center, YouthCAST, Starbucks, Apple Store, Apple Harvest, Busy Beaver and Veltre's Pizza.